

Merritt Parkway, Unity Road Bridge  
Spanning Unity Road at the 33.19 mile mark  
on the Merritt Parkway  
Trumbull  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-123

HAER  
CONN,  
1-TRUM,  
13-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
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# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER  
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## Merritt Parkway, Unity Road Bridge

HAER No. CT-123

**Location:** Spanning Unity Road at the 33.19 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.652960.4566470  
Quad: Bridgeport, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** 1940

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Architect:** George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

**Contractor:** Mariani Construction Company  
New Haven, Connecticut

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Unity Road

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In 1668, there were only five settlers living beyond the two- mile limit of the Stratford meeting house. Shortly after this date, the land north of Stratford was surveyed, laid out and assigned to individuals. It is unknown if anyone settled there before Abraham Nichols and his family arrived from Stratford in 1690. Other families soon followed, creating a district known as Nichols Farms.<sup>1</sup>

As the population increased, the desire for a local church and government became evident. In 1725, Nichols Farms residents petitioned the General Court for village privileges and a committee was named to view their case. The General Assembly acted in favor of their petition and in October 1725 the Assembly granted the residents of Nichols Farms the "liberty of village privileges," as the Society of Unity. Unity was still a part of Stratford, but could maintain its own meeting house and school, through a local tax.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, residents from Fairfield were clearing lands west of Unity. This area came to be known as the Long Hill region and faced many of the same problems as Nichols Farms. These settlers were forced to pay for a church and school that were too far away for them to use.<sup>3</sup>

In 1740 the General Assembly granted the Long Hill region an exemption from paying taxes for the school and meeting house in Stratfield, between December and mid March. Furthermore, Long Hill was allowed to develop its own meeting house during these months. Thus, the Winter Society of Long Hill was created; this arrangement continued for four years.

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<sup>1</sup>History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972, (Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972), 25.

<sup>2</sup>History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 26.

<sup>3</sup>David A. Cronin, "History of Trumbull, Connecticut," Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration, (Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935), 5.

In 1744, the parishes of Unity and Long Hill, only five miles apart, were consolidated into the Society of North Stratford. The new society functioned in virtually the same manor as the Unity parish. As they were now allowed to manage their own religious and educational affairs, residents became anxious to obtain complete independence from Stratford. For more than fifty years North Stratford sought to become an individual township. In October 1797, the General Assembly passed the "Trumbull Bill" establishing the Society of North Stratford as the town of Trumbull.<sup>4</sup>

The Boston Post Road and the main line of the railroad both passed to the south of Trumbull, isolating the community as a rural farming region until the completion of the Merritt Parkway in 1940. Trumbull was the location the Connecticut Highway Department's main field office during the construction of the Merritt Parkway.

#### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Unity Road commences at White Plains Road just south of the parkway and proceeds northeast until it intersects with the Huntington Turnpike at Nichols. The D. V. Frione Construction Company, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Main Street/Route 25 to the Huntington Turnpike, in Trumbull (ConnDot project #180-02). While the Unity Road Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Mariani Construction

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<sup>4</sup>History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 28.

Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project #180-119).<sup>5</sup> The bridge cost \$56,638 and was completed in 1940.<sup>6</sup> The paving work for this region of the Merritt also extended from the Black Rock Turnpike to Main Street/Route 25. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project #180-102).

Since the Unity Road Bridge was erected, it has had sections of spalling concrete removed and patched. In 1990, part of the ornamental hand-railing had to be replaced after it was damaged by a car.<sup>7</sup>

#### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Unity Road Bridge is a single-span deck bridge comprising nine steel rigid frames to carry the Merritt Parkway at a skew over Unity Road. Parallel wing walls form the approach for the overpass. The rigid-frame design allows the engineer to decrease the structural material at the center of the span, thus forming an arched opening. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The steel frames are I-sections built up from angles covered with plates for flanges and plates for webs. All flange and web pieces are welded. Channel sections serve as cross braces for adjacent frames. The legs of the frame are encased in concrete pilasters at the wing walls.

The architectural detailing of the Unity Road Bridge is simple and limited to an Art Deco railing. The faces of the wing walls are smooth except for two thin horizontal grooves near the top. A pylon is

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<sup>5</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

<sup>6</sup>Unity Road Bridge, DOT #754; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

<sup>7</sup>Unity Road Bridge, DOT #753; Bridge Maintenance File.

articulated only at the northeast corner of the bridge with a simple rectangular shape. The metal railing is composed of five rails made from flat bars and square posts. The posts are decorated with four metal funnel shapes. Midway between each post is a vertical bar, same size as the rails, that serves as a trunk for scrolls between rails. The scrolls decrease in size from the bottom rail to the top, and as a whole, they resemble a Christmas tree in shape. Between the posts and this intermediate design, vertical bars are placed between the rails to form a stepping square pattern.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Cronin, David A. "History of Trumbull, Connecticut." Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration. Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935.
- , History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972. Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972.
- , Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.
- , Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

#### PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

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The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.